

Impact Statement

Colson Gomez, Grade 8.

Behind the Lens, 2022.

Mixed media sculpture, 6 x 10 x 12 inches.

LaVilla School of the Arts, Jacksonville, FL

Ungsung Hero: Lewis Hine

I found my subject simply by scrolling through the list of approved figures on the Lowell Milken Center website. Lewis Hine interested me at first because he was fighting for a cause that didn't really affect him in the way that it affected others; he was an adult man bringing awareness to children working or being forced to work in unsafe environments. Another thing that made me choose him was the medium he was using to draw awareness. Hine used creativity and art to speak to people. He used his camera to make a difference.

After I chose Hine as my unsung hero and started doing research on him, I found out that he often had to disguise himself to be able to photograph these children. Companies didn't want the public to be aware of the issue of child labor, so they did not allow photographers in their factories or other buildings and mines. Hine's solution was to assume the identity of a salesman, inspector, or vendor of any sort so he could enter these areas without being threatened with death or physical violence, which the factory policemen could be prone to doing. This bit of information illuminated Hine as an even braver and more selfless person than I originally thought—he was risking his life and health for these children that he didn't know, without an ulterior motive for his own benefit, simply to help fix this pressing social issue. After this research I had an idea for my project; Hine would be simply a silhouette without detail because that was symbolically where he stood in his work. He was behind the camera, not seeking critical acclaim, attention, or any other selfish benefits, just an invisible man in relation to those kids. That's why I put him in the foreground of my project, finally getting the recognition he deserved, but still not the focus of this issue. Behind him are the laborers, half his height and some shorter, and he becomes a protector and a leader of a cause, because these are just children, after all. The laborers are all designed after actual photos Hine took of children in factories, mills, or mines where they worked. Among them are small bottles, like the kids working in the glasswork factories would make. All these child laborers are inside a box with gears on the walls, to make it resemble a factory or machinery, with a spool of thread hanging on the ceiling and strung across the box lengthwise. This is meant to add to the slight allusion to the box being a prison, like the children's field of work was to them. However, in addition to the whole project resembling a prison or a cage, it is also attached to three limbs, like a camera resting on a tripod.

If I had to choose one lesson to walk away from this project with, I would say that it's to be more like Lewis Hine. Selfless, using his own method to help change something he knew needed changing. Even when it didn't seem to benefit him, or when it seemed specifically like it could harm him in any way, he remained active, fighting this problem. I think society as a whole could take a leaf out of his book, and I think I personally could too. That's how I'll apply what I've learned to my life. I'll hold myself to being more like Hine, and I'll continue to remember and honor what he's done for his community, and what he's done for society today.